

## THE GREAT FULLNESS OF BE LONGING – Sermon by Pedro Silva 8/22/21

Let us pray.

God who is fullness of joy. In the words that are spoken in this hour, fill us with your belonging so that we might be in joy with you. In the way of Christ we pray. Amen.

I have come to the conclusion that I am naive. And I just may be stuck this way.

[naive - natural, genuine; just born; foolish, innocent; unspoiled]

A few days ago, I was in a conversation with a young aspiring filmmaker who wants to use art and other expressions of Creativity to inspire folks to live more justly. We were specifically talking about an idea that came to me about sharing the stories of some of our homeless neighbors. She had been inspired by a conversation she had with someone experiencing homelessness and told a mutual acquaintance who suggested that she and I talk about some wishful thinking I had mentioned to her and some other local homeless advocates like Jennifer Livovich, Director of Feet Forward, from last week's mission moment.

In our conversation, the young Creative asked me some questions about what inspired me to engage people experiencing homelessness and as I answered her, I heard myself sounding like I just showed up to earth. Becoming slightly self-conscious about how I was sounding, saying things along the lines of "...and if people knew that they belonged, they wouldn't make choices as if they and others didn't belong and then we could create systems and processes that reflect all of our belonging...yadda yadda yadda." Then realizing that I might be sounding a little Pollyanna and imagining my words invoking a parodied chorus of folks holding hands and singing "Kumbaya my Lord, Kumbaya", I assured her that I am not as naive as I sound and that I know that the world's problems are more than a listening ear and a hug away from being solved.

But then, later that night, as Kelly and I talked about a friend our age that we just learned had died, Kev Dugan, I thought again, "Well maybe I am naive enough to believe that the world's problems are just a listening ear and a hug away from being solved."

In the past month, we have been in a series of conversations where my intent was to convey to anyone listening that all of us truly are children of God--the totality of which could be summed up in the Richard Rohr quote that I will share once again:

“Knowing our true identity as sons and daughters of God can save us thousands of dollars in psychotherapy. Knowing that everyone else is a child of God— and treating them as such—can save the world!”

In each message, I tried to articulate our essential belongingness in a variety of ways from expressing that, like God, the larger part of what makes us, us is comprised of our invisible attributes to trying to demonstrate how neglecting the feminine attributes of God, which were equally from the beginning with all of God’s other attributes, shuts us all out of the deeper relating possible when we allow ourselves to be mothered by God. We also talked about evil not just being the perpetration of unnecessary and avoidable harm for sheerly selfish reasons. But rather, we talked about M. Scott Peck’s notion of evil as the highest form of laziness where he says, “[Evil people] will take any action in their power to protect their own laziness, to preserve the integrity of their sick self. Rather than nurturing others, they will actually destroy others in this cause. If necessary, they will even kill to escape the pain of their own spiritual growth.”

And we concluded that if M. Scott Peck is right that evil actions are ultimately the result of trying to escape the pain of spiritual growth, then as citizens of a Spiritocracy, remembering our true identity and reminding others of theirs would be the essence of overcoming evil with good as we have been instructed in Romans 12:21.

So now, we have come to the end of this series where it is my naive hope that in taking to heart the essential belonging of all beings, you too may walk away considering the possibility that the world’s problems are just a listening ear and a hug away from being solved.

As you will notice on the bulletin cover, I tried to play around with the image and title a bit. The image is of what appears to be graffiti art of these little dots of a variety of colors coming together to create one big heart that both contains each of the dots and yet permits, for the lack of a better word, each dot to retain what makes them distinct. To my mind, that is a perfect expression of what it means to truly belong. Then, with the title I had fun with the words Gratefulness and Belonging and turned them into The Great Fullness of Be Longing. The Great Fullness of Be Longing. And it is from the awareness that this title is inviting us into that we will close out this series.

In the epilogue of her book, *Wake Up Grateful: The Transformative Practice of Taking Nothing for Granted*, Kristi Nelson, Executive Director of A Network for Grateful Living and a nearly 30 year cancer survivor writes in early 2020 as the reality of the pandemic was starting to settle upon us:

"We are confronted as a nation and a globe with unparalleled uncertainty. We are questioning and ceasing many aspects of our daily lives, enduring days of greater isolation, fear in the face of the unknown and suffering with what is known. Try as we might, we have absolutely NO IDEA what will unfold from here, but we do know that we will be challenged. And we also know that we will be presented with abundant opportunities to reorient ourselves toward a way of life that is sustainable and recognizes our interdependence, that exhibits GREATER APPRECIATION for the Earth and one another. And like any pilgrimage worth the journey, we will learn a lot about ourselves and about love — if we commit to taking nothing in our lives for granted, and continually say yes to the invitations for transformation we are extended."

I will say it again.

"And like any pilgrimage WORTH the journey, we will learn a lot about ourselves and about love — IF we commit to taking nothing in our lives for granted, and continually say yes to the invitations for transformation we are extended."

In Kevin's message last week, where he talked about the lessons from the pandemic, he reminded us that if we heard the voices of people living with disabilities YEARS AGO, many of the adaptations that were made to confront the challenges of the coronavirus, would have already been in place before anything like this ever occurred--had we said yes to the invitation for transformation we were extended by these members of our communities.

Living from the awareness of the Great Fullness of Be Longing is such an invitation for transformation.

When we talked about how our invisible attributes make up the greater part of each and every one of us, my hope was that you felt deeply that when we account for our own invisible attributes as well as those of all of our brothers and sisters throughout Creation, we will discover that in fact, there is a great and yet often untapped fullness to all of life that we miss because we tend to be distracted by what can be seen rather than ATTRACTED by what cannot.

Albert Einstein said that there are only two ways to live life—as if nothing is a miracle and as if everything is. What we're trying to connect with, of course, is the latter. For as you know, I believe that this is the inheritance of all of God's children. And once we receive it for ourselves, we can't help but desire it for others. Because when we allow ourselves to see the Great Fullness, we can only be satisfied with living gratefulness.

What is Grateful Living?

According to the A Network for Grateful Living website,

Grateful living brings the abundant gifts of gratitude to life – in all the moments of our lives. It is a way of life that invites us to take nothing for granted, cultivating awareness of and appreciation for the fullness of our lives. Living gratefully helps us awaken to the opportunities that are ALWAYS available – even in the most challenging times – to learn, grow, and extend ourselves with compassion to ourselves, others, and the world. As we endeavor to notice our inner and outer landscape with wider eyes, we deepen our engagement and embrace of life in all its poignancy and preciousness. We come alive, opening up to wonder, joy, and love.

Let me ask you a question. Have you come alive, opening up to wonder, joy, and love?

Now if your answer to that question is no, believe me, I get it. I'm not that naïve. I see what's going on in our world right now and I am aware of our complicated history that has left generations traumatized in its wake. I know that many of us today are putting in a lot of work to overcome painful experiences. And the thought of thinking of God as either Father or Mother brings up feelings that we'd rather not think about. Everyday, there are scores of people who die by suicide. And countless more of us who find a temporary reprieve from the pain of living through the use of substances or other addictions or behaviors we use to fill the "aleness gap" that we talked about.

And yet, is it not true that what has brought each of us here to this moment is some sense of a better world--a feeling that if we could just organize everything just so, the world could be perfect, or what we called a few weeks ago, a longing to reconnect with our pretrauma selves? What I am calling a BE LONGING--the longing to simply be.

Now, let's ask ourselves, where does that be longing come from? Especially for those of us who have had visibly challenging life experiences. Why do we even hope for better than we've ever experienced a world where we can be loved and belong unconditionally.

According to her article in Forbes magazine, Missing Your People: Why Belonging Is So Important And How to Create It, a recent MIT study found we crave belonging interactions in the same region of our brain where we crave food, and another study showed we experienced social exclusion in the same region of our brain where we experience physical pain. In other words, we seem to be wired for a hunger to belong.

And, if you asked someone like Sigmund Freud, who thought even the notion of loving our neighbor as ourselves was absurd, he might say that this longing comes from a desire to return to our mother's bosom--to the place where presumably most of us felt the most protected and cared for or at least where we developed the expectation that we should be protected and cared for.

Freud's summation was that anyone who professed a universal love or a possibility of indiscriminate belonging was actually motivated by an unconscious desire for self protection. And in his book, *The Question of God*, which he designed to function as a debate between C.S. Lewis and Freud, Dr. Armand Nicholi indicates that from Freud's perspective, no one went further in exploiting love for the inner feeling of happiness than St. Francis of Assisi whose prayer we will soon take part in.

However, if you ask his imaginary debate partner--you knew I wasn't going to end this series without a Lewis quote--"If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." In other words, we were created with this longing to be. And the Creator has and will fulfill that desire.

As you would imagine I lean toward Lewis in this debate. But like anything Lewis says, he has a longer explanation for how he arrived at this notion. So, I would like to point you to our scripture for today where the author puts these words in the mouth of the Vineyard's owner, who of course is analogous to God, when they are questioned about their generosity, "Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?" Or are you envious because I am generous?' [Greek translation - *is your eye evil because I am good?*]

A number of years ago, I wrote a fictional account of this story in an attempt to unpack this parable. As I wondered about the transformational opportunity Jesus was offering in its telling, I noticed a few examples in the story of behaviors we tend to exhibit that might cause us to miss out on the Great Fullness of Be Longing.

1. Comparison - rather than gratefully receive the wage they agreed to, this disappointed worker compared what they received to what others received and felt disappointed. How often do we do that?
2. Misperception - We tend to think that the way we see things are the way that they are. In the Greek translation of verse 15, the words "Or are you envious because I am generous?" are translated as - *is your eye evil because I am good?* When we judge the size of the iceberg by its tip, we

are missing most of what is actually there. And too often as a result, we make complete mistakes based on incomplete information. The angry laborer thought they had figured out that they would get more based on what they saw other people getting and was disappointed when reality didn't match their perception. How often do we make up a story about how things are going to be and when reality shows up, we end up blaming the world and everyone else for the discrepancy rather than simply examining our own thoughts on the matter?

3. Earning by Works - Remember this is a parable and not a business plan. It begins with the words, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like..." and proceeds to show the landowner paying the same wage or expressing the same great fullness to anyone who showed up to work no matter how long they labored. I imagine it's a rare person who wouldn't feel like the angry laborer who felt like they deserved more because they worked more. Just talk about Universal Basic Income or just Universal Healthcare and we will see what kind of frenzy ensues in this country. We have a hard time with the thought of someone receiving something that we don't think they earned. But, according to this teaching, the Kingdom of Heaven is like the very opposite of that notion. What the Creator is offering is an inheritance. And no one earns an inheritance. When we think we have to earn what God is giving we will never be able to work enough to fill the longing for what God gives freely. So, if you could be shown how, would you be willing to receive the unearnable Great Fullness of Be Longing and equally desire it for all other beings?

If it's too soon for you, I understand. But I want to share a practice with you just in case it serves. I've shared with many of you that what keeps me pursuing Christ, is not miracles, duty, or even the hope of a future reward. But rather, it is wonder at how someone in the height of physical, mental, and emotional suffering can still find it within themselves to pray for others. "Forgive them for they know not what they do."

And this is why I can't agree with Freud's logic. Where is the self-protection in that prayer? I cannot find it. And so I am left to wonder about our relationship to the source of fullness from which Jesus drew the strength to pray that prayer and his teaching that we have access to that very source. It was as if he was filled with a fullness that nothing on earth could empty him of. And I believe that is what he desires for us all.

So if Peck was right and evil people, if necessary, will even kill to escape the pain of their own spiritual growth, the fullness Christ brings would, if necessary, would compel one to lay down their lives for our spiritual growth.

Earlier, I said that I may very well be naive enough to believe that the world's problems are just a listening ear and a hug away from being solved. And, I can imagine many people feeling that this is a far fetched notion.

But now, I want to invite you to try something. Ask yourself, "If there was one person who I wish would just listen to me pour out my heart to them and then give me a hug, who would that be?"

I would venture to say that most of us have someone in mind.

Now, let me ask you, what would receiving that gift add to your life? Whatever that is, desire it for others. Because if enough of us do this, it just might save the world.

In the end the angry laborer was told to take what belonged to them and go. This was not because the landowner didn't want to give to them, but because the person didn't want the other laborers to equally receive.

It is this type of mentality that expands our aloneness gap and makes us feel even more left out. So much so that we might create an identity where we feel like we belong to not belonging.

[Holy Spirit]

### BELONGING TO NOT BELONGING

Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*

*Stop walking through the world looking for confirmation that you don't belong. You will always find it because you've made that your mission. Stop scouring people's faces for evidence that you're not enough. You will always find it because you've made that your goal. True belonging and self-worth are not goods; we don't negotiate their value with the world. The truth about who we are lives in our hearts. Our call to courage is to protect our wild heart against constant evaluation, especially our own. No one belongs here more than you.*

[Holy Spirit]

"Even when I am afraid, I choose to face challenges with the fullness that I am." - Rashad Robinson, Civil Rights Leader, President of Color of Change

[Holy Spirit]

“How did we know to look for these invisible frequencies in the first place?” It would make no sense to create a tool to find something that you didn’t suspect was there.

What if what you are looking for wants to be found just as much as we want to find it.

Amen.